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Memoir of Joshua Scottow (1816)

"Sigma" (pseudonym)

Massachusetts Historical Society

Paul Royster (transcribed and deposited by)

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MEMOIR OF JOSHUA SCOTTOW.*

OF the list of authors, who have been citizens of Boston, collected by one of our most diligent antiquaries, and published in the third volume of the first series of our collections, Scottow is the earliest that is unmentioned in the New England Biographical Dictionary. The omission must have arisen from the difficulty of obtaining materials for such a notice, as that biographer would choose to give; for though his selection of names is made with much propriety, some of them would by himself have been postponed to that of the subject of this memoir. How correctly he could determine on the real value of our oldest literary productions, though ever so much over-rated by other judges, were it necessary in any case to vindicate the sentences of Dr. Eliot, might be seen in his sketch of Denison.

The first mention of Joshua Scottow, traced by my inquiries, is in the records of the Old Church, in the tenth page of which it is noted, that "Thomas Scottowe and Joshua Scottowe, the sonnes of our sister Thomasine Scottowe," were admitted members on the 19th of the third month, 1639. Two years before, his brother had leave, from the authority of the town, to build an house on his mother's ground, which is recorded in the Selectmen's books, Vol. i. From the same book it appears, a great lot, at Muddy River, was granted to Thomas, in 1638, for three heads; which, being not yet laid out, was enlarged, the next year, to be a lot for five heads. In that year, a great lot for three heads was granted to Joshua. He was probably the younger son, and brought from England by his mother, a widow, admitted of the same church, 21 September, 1634. He was well entitled, therefore, sixty years after, to call himself an Old Planter.

He was married, probably, in 1640, as the first mention of the birth of one of his children is 30 September, in the following year. Seven are

noted in the Records, of whom four are named in his will, made 23 June, 1696. By it he gave all his estate to his wife for her life; and after, to be divided, a double portion to that of any other child to his son Thomas, and the residue equally betwixt his daughters Elizabeth Savage, Rebecca Blackman, and Mary Checkley, providing that, if Thomas died without heirs, his portion should go to Elizabeth. Scottow died, I suppose, in February, 1697—8, for his will was proved 3 March of that year, by Major Thomas Savage and Captain Samuel Checkley, his executors, whose wives were the children of the testator. Checkley's son and grandson were Boston ministers. The daughters of Scottow were all older than the son, who was born 30 June, 1659, and was graduated at Harvard College, 1677. He is the only person of the family name in the catalogue; and however numerous and respectable the descendants by the female line have been, the patronymick is perhaps extinct.

He was a merchant of much respectability, and his name frequently occurs in the affairs of the town. I have not been able to discover how he was concerned in the case mentioned by Hutchinson, sub anno 1665, when the royal commissioners, Col. Nichols and others, summoned the Governour and Company of Massachusetts, and Joshua Scottow, merchant, to answer the complaint of Thomas Deane and others, for injustice done them, when the Charles of Oleron came into Boston. Perhaps he was owner of the cargo, or consignee of the ship. The question was on the laws of trade, which, it is probable, had been violated. In a few days after, having first published by sound of trumpet, in three publick places, a declaration of opposition to the authority, the Court summoned Deane to appear and make good his complaints. In that summons, of which, with all the other acts of the Court and Commissioners, an account, much more comprehensive than is any where printed, is now lying before me, the Court say "the Charles of Oleron came into this port of Boston about the year 1661."

The first publication of Scottow has a title, whose length is not less striking than its quaintness. "Old Men's Tears for their own Declensions, mixed with Fears of their and posterities further falling off

* Published in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 2nd series, 4 (1816), pp. 100–104.

from New-England's Primitive Constitution. Published by some of Boston's old Planters and some other." It was printed 1691. It is, as might be supposed, a lamentation for the state of the country. The writer imagined, that the prevalence of sin had called down the vengeance of heaven upon our land, which was shown in many instances of punishment, as "strange diseases, not suited formerly to the pure and serene air of our climate, (whither strangers were wont to have recourse to recover their desired health.) Not only with the infectious small pox have we laboured under, but with burning and spotted fevers, shaking agues," &c. The Indian war, and the ill success of the great expedition against Canada in the preceding year, were marks of divine displeasure. "Hath he not himself fought against us, by the stars in their courses, and his anger smoked against our prayers; raising snow and vapour, and his, cold (which no man can abide) with the stormy wind fulfilling his word, to the impeding and disappointment of our naval military design, and disabling our fleet," &c.

The degeneracy of the times, which provoked such, chastisement, is witnessed against in such language as this: "Our spot is not the spot of God's children; the old puritan garb, and gravity of heart, and habit lost and ridiculed into strange and fantastick fashions and attire, naked backs and bare breasts, and forehead if not of the whorish woman, yet so like unto it as would require a more than ordinary spirit of discerning to distinguish; the virgins dress and matrons veil, showing their power on their heads, because of the holy angels, turned into powdered foretops and top-gallants attire, not becoming the Christian, but the comedian assembly, not the church, but stage-play, where the devil sits regent in his dominion, as he once boasted out of the mouth of a demoniack, church-member, he there took possession of, and made this response to the church, supplicating her deliverance; so as now we may and must say, New-England is not to be found in New-England, nor Boston in Boston; it is become a lost town (as at first it was called;) we must now cry out, our leanness, our leanness, our apostacy, our apostacy, our atheism, spiritual idolatry, adultery, formality in worship,

carnal and vain confidence in church privileges, forgetting of God our rock, and multitude of other abominations," &c.

Happily we have since reformed, at least from such a stile, of which the pathos is not more remarkable than the wit. The founder of the college of the Jesuits he calls "igne-nate, hell-born Loyola, the Canadian tutelar saint." The name "A JESUITE is truly in our English, Depart ye from Jesus;" and no tenderness could be expected from him towards "the three-headed Cerberus with the triple crown of the papal Pontifex maximus." I have read in a page of Sterne his wonder, that this story had never been brought from the mythology of the heathen to prognosticate the tiara of the bishop of Rome.

This book consists of only twenty six pages. What success attended it, it would be now vain to inquire. Another addition, in 1749, was printed for D. Gookin; but it omits the address to the reader of four pages, which is the best part of the work. In 1694 was printed and published by Benjamin Harris, at the sign of the Bible over against the Blue-Anchor, "A Narrative of the Planting of the Massachusetts Colony, Anno 1628, With the Lord's signal presence the first thirty years. Also a caution from New England's Apostle, the great Cotton, how to escape the calamity, which might befall them or their posterity, and confirmed by the evangelist Norton with prognosticks from the famous Dr. Owen concerning the fate of these churches, and animadversions upon the anger of God in sending of evil angels among us. Published by Old Planters, the authors of the Old Men's Tears." It contains, besides the dedication of two pages to Simon Broadstreet, Esq. late Governour of the Massachusetts Colony, seventy six pages. Most of what is valuable may be found in the notes to Judge Davis' Address, in the first volume of the present series of our collections. We could, for a few anecdotes even of trifling affairs, much more for the relation of important facts, now irretrievably lost, gladly have missed the repetition of wailings for general depravity that had increased as the author grew older, only because a larger part of his fellow-citizens were younger.